

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:      TELLING A PICTURE OF RAPE: THE VISUAL AND  
THE VERBAL IN SHAKESPEARE'S "LUCRECE"

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In 1594 William Shakespeare first published his narrative poem *Lucrece*, which retells the historic-mythic tale of Lucretia's rape and the resulting conversion of Rome to a republic. This thesis offers a new interpretation of the poem's interdisciplinary significance by examining Shakespeare's election of Lucretia's story as a vehicle for expositing his philosophy of art, recoverable in visual and verbal elements woven throughout his poem. This philosophical subtext, I argue, advocates a complimentary understanding and use of visual and verbal modes of description, and explores painting's ability to aid the viewer's understanding of reality. After establishing *Lucrece*'s subtext, I examine Shakespeare's likely sources: written accounts by Livy, Ovid, and Chaucer, and a range of Renaissance pictorial depictions. Additionally, I consider Shakespeare's engagement with the theory of *ut pictura poesis* and the British ekphrastic poetic tradition. In conclusion, I share some thoughts on *Lucrece*'s impact on the arts and Shakespeare's own work.

TELLING A PICTURE OF RAPE: THE VISUAL AND THE VERBAL IN  
SHAKESPEARE'S "LUCRECE"

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	iii
Telling a Picture of Rape: The Visual and the Verbal in Shakespeare's <i>Lucrece</i> .....	1
Figures.....	47
Bibliography.....	55



## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Anonymous, *Lucretia*, from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, 1404 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 598, fol. 72v.).....47
2. Sandro Botticelli, *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, c.1499, tempera on panel (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum).....47
3. Paolo Veronese, *Lucretia*, 1580-85, oil on canvas (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie).....48
4. Israhel van Mechenem, *The Suicide of Lucretia*, c. 1500-03, engraving (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art).....48
5. Tiziano Vecellio (called Titian), *Tarquin and Lucretia*, c.1570, oil on canvas (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).....49
6. Heinrich Aldegrever after George Pencz, *Tarquinius and Lucretia*, 1539, engraving (London, The British Museum).....49
7. Giorgio Ghisi after Giulio Romano, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, c.1540, engraving (California, Collection of R.E. Lewis, Inc.).....50
8. Agostino Veneziano after Raphael, reworked by Enea Vico, *Tarquinius and Lucretia*, 1524, engraving (London, The British Museum).....50
9. Hans Baldung Grien, *The Death of Lucretia*, c.1511, woodcut (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts).....51
10. Enea Vico after Parmigianino, *Lucretia Preparing to Kill Herself*, engraving (London, The British Museum).....51
11. Hans Brosamer, *Death of Lucretia*, 1537, engraving (London, The Warburg Institute).....52
12. Claes Jansz. Visscher, *The Play of Lucretia's Sacrifice*, 1609, engraving (Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet).....52
13. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Lucretia*, c.1623-25, oil on canvas (Milan, Gerolamo Etro).....53
14. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Rape of Lucretia*, c.1645, oil on canvas (Potsdam, Neues Palais).....53

15. Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Lucretia*, 1664, oil on canvas (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art).....54
16. Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Lucretia*, 1666, oil on canvas (Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts).....54

In 1594 William Shakespeare (1564-1616) published the First Quarto of his narrative poem *Lucrece*. This work was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, as was its pendant poem *Venus and Adonis* written in the previous year. Together the two poems constitute the only published works in which Shakespeare assumes the role of professional poet.<sup>1</sup> In *Lucrece*, the poet reimagines the classical historic-mythic tale of Lucretia's rape and the resulting conversion of Rome from monarchy to republic. Because of its uniqueness in Shakespeare's oeuvre, the poem has received much attention in the literature.<sup>2</sup> Among the scholars who have addressed its visual themes are Barbara Baines, Leonard Barkan, Mary Garrard, and David Rosand.

This thesis offers a new interpretation of the poem's interdisciplinary significance. I examine Shakespeare's *Lucrece* as a nearly two-thousand-line meditation on art, poetry, and the dual abilities of the visual and the verbal to persuade, deceive, and evoke emotion. I then argue that these embedded elements constitute a philosophy of art, albeit informally presented, which advocates a complimentary use of visual and verbal elements and argues for the ability of painting to illuminate truth for the viewer, leading to a more complete understanding of reality. After establishing the existence and nature of this subtext, some relevant contextual issues will be explored. In creating his argument, Shakespeare draws on both images and texts. Some examples of these resources will be examined with respect to their relevancy in recovering the embedded aesthetic expositions in *Lucrece*. Additionally, I will consider Shakespeare's motivation

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<sup>1</sup> F.T. Prince, ed., *The Poems*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), xxv.

<sup>2</sup> A sampling of critical works that focus on *Lucrece* can be found in Clifford Chalmers Huffman and John W. Veltz, ed., *The Rape of Lucrece, Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, and Coriolanus: an annotated bibliography of Shakespeare studies, 1910-2000*, Pegasus Shakespeare Bibliographies, ed. Richard L. Nochimson (Fairview, NC: Pegasus Press, 2002), 28-38.

for writing the poem; primarily, the ways in which he engages with the theme of *ut pictura poesis* and the British tradition of ekphrastic poetry. Lastly, I will conclude with some thoughts on the impact of *Lucrece* on the arts and Shakespeare's own work.

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"The Argument," a short synopsis of Lucretia's story, precedes Shakespeare's poem. It is as follows:

*Lucius Tarquinius (for his excessive pride surnamed Superbus), after he had caused his own father-in-law Servius Tullius to be cruelly murdered, and, contrary to the Roman laws and customs, not requiring or staying for the people's suffrages, had possessed himself of the kingdom, went, accompanied with his sons and other noblemen of Rome, to besiege Ardea. During which siege, the principal men of the army meeting one evening at the tent of Sextus Tarquinius, the King's son, in their discourses after supper everyone commended the virtues of his own wife; among whom Collatinus extolled the incomparable chastity of his wife Lucretia. In that pleasant humour they all posted to Rome, and, intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial of that which everyone had before avouched, only Collatinus finds his wife, though it were late in the night, spinning amongst her maids; the other ladies were all found dancing and reveling, or in several disports. Whereupon the noblemen yielded Collatinus the victory, and his wife the fame. As that time Sextus Tarquinius, being inflamed with Lucretia's beauty, yet smothering his passions for the present, departed with the rest back to the camp; from whence he shortly after privily withdrew himself, and was, according to his estate, royally entertained and lodged by Lucrece at Collatium. The same night he treacherously stealeth into her chamber, violently ravished her, and early in the morning speedeth away. Lucrece, in this lamentable plight, hastily despatcheth messengers, one to Rome for her father, another to camp for Collatine. They came, the one accompanied with Junius Brutus, the other with Publius Valerius; and finding Lucrece attired in mourning habit, demanded the cause of her sorrow. She, first taking an oath of them for her revenge, revealed the actor, and whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself. Which done, with one consent they all vowed to root out the whole hated family of the Tarquins and, bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed, with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King. Wherewith the people were so moved, that with one consent and a general*

*acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled, and the state government changed from kings to consuls.*<sup>3</sup>

This synopsis serves to clarify Shakespeare's poetic account of the narrative, which begins *in medias res*, "lust-breathed" Tarquinius (or Tarquin) already speeding towards Collatia (3), and which focuses on just a few expanded moments in the story: Lucretia and Tarquin's lengthy dialogue of threats and pleas prior to the rape; Lucretia's extensive soliloquy following her assault; and the gruesome death scene, after which the poem concludes almost immediately.

Despite its function, many dispute Shakespeare's authorship of the Argument and contend that the publisher inserted it to aid unlearned readers.<sup>4</sup> Several discrepancies between the Argument and the content of the poem lend credence to these arguments. For example, Shakespeare's poem deletes the episode described in the Argument wherein the soldiers covertly observe the actions of their wives. Moreover, in the poem Tarquin is motivated to act by Collatinus (or Collatine)'s description, rather than by Lucretia's physical presence.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Argument omits Tarquin's threat to murder

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations of the Shakespeare poem are taken from the text reproduced in Prince, *Poems*, 64-149, which is based on the First Quarto, the only version for which Shakespeare's autonomous control can be assumed. For more information on the authenticity of the first and subsequent Quartos, see Prince, xiii-xx. <sup>4</sup>As one who rejects the necessity of "The Argument," and therefore its authenticity, Joel Fineman contends that epic poems of familiar subjects often begin in such an abbreviated manner, and that the story was famous enough to warrant the exclusion of an optional narrative foreword. Joel Fineman, "Shakespeare's will: the Temporality of Rape," *Representations* 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy (Autumn 1987): 26. Fineman also notes why scholars typically reject the authenticity of "The Argument": the opening line of Shakespeare's dedication, which names the work "this Pamphlet without beginning," seemingly acknowledges the poem's *in medias res* beginning. A condensed account of the story at the outset of the poem would then seem to contradict Shakespeare's description of his own work. Additionally, Prince notes that the prose of this passage is unlike that found in Shakespeare's plays and instead seems to imitate the Latin of its sources. Prince, *Poems*, 65 n. T.W. Baldwin argues that the Livy and Ovid accounts were sources for "The Argument." T.W. Baldwin, *On the Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Poems and Sonnets* (Urbana, Ill., 1950), 108-12. For arguments against Shakespeare's authorship of "The Argument," see James M. Tolbert, "The Argument of Shakespeare's 'Lucrece': its Sources and Authorship," *Studies in English* 29 (1950): 77-90.

<sup>5</sup> Taking a slightly different reading of essentially the same contradiction, T.W. Baldwin points out the "apparent discrepancy between the Argument and the first three stanzas, which say nothing of the test by which Collatine proved his wife's virtue, but suggest that he boasted of her chastity a second time, on the

Lucretia and disgrace her honor by placing her naked body with that of a slave if she resists. As emphasized in the poem, Lucretia's dread of such a possibility precipitates her submission. Furthermore, the Argument identifies the four witnesses to Lucretia's death by name, whereas the poem gives the impression of a much larger, vaguer gathering of observers, which includes her father, Collatine, "and all his lordly crew" (1731). An additional striking difference is found between the wronged Lucretia of the Argument, who "hastily despatcheth messangers," and the poem's Lucretia who spends the bulk of the text debating her course of action subsequent to the rape. Finally, Shakespeare inserts an extensive description of a painting that depicts the Fall of Troy, which is not discussed in the prologue or in any previous account. Nevertheless, even if the Argument was not Shakespeare's invention, it provides a convenient encapsulation of the story as it was understood by Shakespeare's audience.

The inconsistencies between The Argument and *Lucrece* draw attention to Shakespeare's dramatic alteration of some traditional components of the story. These narrative shifts signal Shakespeare's unusual attention to visual and verbal elements throughout his poem. Two such changes highlight his interest in the dual descriptive modes: the elimination of the scene wherein the soldiers secretly observe their wives and the addition of a lengthy ekphrastic passage on the painting of the Fall of Troy. Shakespeare transfers the source of Tarquin's lust from Lucretia's appearance to Collatine's description of her virtue, thereby emphasizing the importance of the verbal over the visual. The episode where Lucretia studies the grand painting of the Fall of Troy is inserted after the rape. Both Shakespeare's ekphrastic description and Lucretia's

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night before Tarquin stole away from Ardea." Baldwin, *Literary Genetics*, 180 as quoted in Prince, *Poems*, 65 n. In fact, I would argue that Shakespeare obliterates the original competition altogether, and therefore, Collatine brags only once, not twice of Lucretia's chastity.

contemplation of this work provide the poet with the opportunity to discuss his views on art and exemplify the imbrications of the verbal and the visual throughout the poem.

Shakespeare's complex views on the nature of verbal and visual influences on human perception are present throughout *Lucrece*. He does not overtly address these matters in a declared thesis; in fact, his assertions and insinuations about the visual and the verbal are often muddled and contradictory. Nevertheless, several major themes can be parsed from the lines of *Lucrece*, which when unified present Shakespeare's perspective on the powers of visual and verbal expression. From its inception, the poem is concerned with the nature of words: their powerful, often dangerous potential, as well as occasional failure or ineffectiveness. Additionally, Shakespeare demonstrates an interest in the nature of the visual, primarily its truthful and deceptive counterparts. Within this investigation, Shakespeare examines the expressive abilities of painting through his ekphrastic passage on the Fall of Troy painting. Most significantly, the poem explores ways in which the visual and the verbal engage with one another; in particular, their complimentary potential.

Shakespeare approaches these concepts in inventive and occasionally unexpected ways. His pictorial description of art through poetic form, however, is far from an original concept. The descriptive passage of the painting of Troy engages with a rich tradition; ekphrastic poetry, rooted in the theory of *ut pictura poesis*—the belief in the similar nature of painting and poetry, originated in Antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Horace wrote, in his

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<sup>6</sup> The most famous ancient discussions of the complimentary nature of painting and poetry are found in Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica*. For a thorough examination of these sources, see Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967). S. Clark Hulse describes the comparisons between Apelles and Homer in Antiquity and Titian and Ariosto in the Renaissance that characterize this discussion. S. Clark Hulse, "'A Piece of Skilful Painting' in Shakespeare's 'Lucrece'," *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978): 18

ancient text *Ars poetica* the phrase *ut pictura poesis*: ‘as is painting, so is poetry’. During the Renaissance, painters motivated by their inferior social status reinvigorated the discussion of the comparative virtues of the two art forms. Some, such as Leonardo da Vinci, even claimed that the merits of painting were in fact superior to poetry.<sup>7</sup> In his *Paragone*, or comparison, from his *Trattato della pittura*, Da Vinci not only argues for the superiority of painting over sculpture, but additionally ranks painting above all other art forms.<sup>8</sup> The ekphrastic poetic form, also an ancient creation, enjoyed a popular revival in Early Modern England, and was sometimes used to counter arguments like Da Vinci’s through the poets’ exquisite verbal descriptions of visual subjects.<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare’s poem engages at least in part with these traditions. Therefore, the artistic relationship between painting and poetry can be read as an additional element explored in *Lucrece*, though in a limited fashion. Shakespeare’s emphasis of the cooperative nature of the visual and the verbal must be understood in this historical and occasionally competitive context.

“Haply that name of “chaste” unhapp’ly set/This bateless edge on his keen appetite” (8-9). These lines, which Shakespeare places at the outset of his poem, define the poet’s greatest departure from the story as told by his predecessors: the description of Lucretia’s beauty, not her beauty itself, is the impetus for Tarquin’s passion/rape. In Shakespeare’s version, the villain is aroused by Collatine’s effusive praise of his wife

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<sup>7</sup> Lee, *Ut Pictura*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Da Vinci argues for painting’s superiority to both poetry and music, which rely for their enjoyment on the ear, an organ less sophisticated than the eye. Specifically, he reasons that great works of art, unlike music or poetry, have been pilgrimage goals, a fact which proves their brilliance. See: Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., revised by David G. Wilkins (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 432-33.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Barkan, “Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 326-347. Barkan discusses the role of ekphrastic poetry in the work of Sidney, Spenser, and Marlowe among others.



before he has even laid eyes on her. The tragic story, which unfurls from its origin in Collatine's utterance and the resulting turmoil that propels Rome to the formation of a republic, is Shakespeare's monumental tribute to the potency of language. At its core, *Lucrece* is structured by instances of rhetorical power: the words that incite Tarquin, the monologue by which Lucrece commits herself to suicide, the rousing speech of Brutus, and the resulting oath to drive Tarquin from the city.

Shakespeare frequently represents the dangerous power of language, particularly through his description of Collatine's boast and Tarquin's treachery. From the inception of the poem, Tarquin, though an evil man, is not wholly responsible for the rape of Lucretia. Instead, Collatine's description of his wife is held culpable. The poet writes, "Why is Collatine the publisher/Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown/From thievish ears, because it is his own?" (33-35). Here Shakespeare insinuates that Tarquin's ears instantly commit the crime, long before Lucretia is ever glimpsed. "Thievish ears," which casts dispersions on the organs themselves, implicates all listeners. In these lines, Shakespeare confronts the reader with the danger of words, a judgment reinforced by the poet's exclusion of Collatine's precise language. The poet, lest he corrupt the readers' ears as well, merely paraphrases the dangerous language. Shakespeare explains, "For by our ears our hearts oft tainted be" (38). This line functions both as a partial reprieve for Tarquin whose passions have been inflamed by Collatine's compelling description, and as a implicit warning to the reader about the potency of language.

The power of words to influence behavior is further investigated through the character of Tarquin whose entire villainous enterprise is undertaken by means of verbal

persuasion. He first engages Lucretia's trust through the use of words as "he stories to her ears her husband's fame" (106). The subsequent threats Tarquin makes to Lucretia, bullying her into submission, prey on her reputation. In Shakespeare's version, Tarquin suggests that she will suffer most not by the rape itself, but through rumors of her involvement with a slave boy. He says to her,

*And in thy dead arms do I mean to place him,  
Swearing I slew him, seeing thee embrace him. (517-18)  
...(you) Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes  
And sung by children in succeeding times (524-25).*

Under the combined influences of Tarquin's threat of defamation and the striking visual image he evokes of her slain and desecrated body coupled with a slave boy, Lucretia finally relents. In these passages it is apparent that Shakespeare utilizes Tarquin as an embodiment of the forcefulness of words.

Shakespeare's display of language's power to advance Tarquin's wicked plans is counter-balanced by the poem's conclusion, which provides an impressive example of the use of words for accomplishing good. Before her death, Lucretia charges the soldiers that surround her, "Knights by their oaths should right poor ladies' harms." (1694). By concluding the poem before physical harm or banishment has befallen Tarquin, Shakespeare once again emphasizes the power of words; it is sufficient that the knights swear revenge, and as the last lines of the poem claim, "The Romans plausibly did give consent/To Tarquin's everlasting banishment" (1854-55). Therefore, Shakespeare's language emphasizes the primacy of the knights' oath as the driving force behind the actions that follow.

Although the power of language is often demonstrated in *Lucrece*, Shakespeare's characters also at times become mired in verbal ineffectiveness. Though Lucretia

indulges in lengthy monologues about her predicament, she admits, “In vain I rail at opportunity” (1023) and “this helpless smoke of words doth me no right” (1027). Many scholars have commented on the problematic nature of these long tirades, which fail to relate the pathos of Lucretia’s psychological distress. F.T. Prince writes piercingly, “After her violation, Lucrece loses our sympathy exactly in proportion as she gives tongue.”<sup>10</sup> Ian Donaldson extends his criticism to the entire cast of *Lucrece* when he writes, “Longing for the simplicity of action, Shakespeare’s characters find themselves entangled in web of words.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, when Lucretia is finally ready to describe her ordeal and she claims, “Few words...shall fit the trespass best” (1613), her speech has a flat, even humorous ring; Shakespeare has already given Lucretia too much voice for her affliction. Yet, though surely the poem is flawed, it is perhaps too hasty to dismiss these contradictions altogether as defects or errors. Instead, one can view the difficulty of articulation expressed in these passages as counterbalancing the rhetorical strength seen elsewhere.

Shakespeare explores the nature of the visual as well as the verbal; in particular, he investigates the belief that ‘seeing is believing,’ just as he has explored the notion that ‘hearing is believing.’ Tarquin and Lucretia serve as counterpoints: the villain who is visually deceptive and the victim who believes earnestly in what she sees. The poem is explicit about Tarquin’s deceptive look upon meeting Lucretia, as it describes how he was

*Hiding base sin in pleats of majesty,  
That nothing in him seem’d inordinate,*

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<sup>10</sup> Prince, *Poems*, xxxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 43.

*Save sometimes too much wonder of his eye  
Which having all, all could not satisfy (lines 93-96).*

Tarquin effectively costumes his attitude, and his intentions are revealed only by the intensity of his gaze. Lucretia, oblivious to the truth in Tarquin's eyes, is unable to parse his intentions from his disguise. Even after Tarquin has revealed himself as a villain in her bedroom, Lucretia still cannot conceive of his countenance as false. She implores, "In Tarquin's likeness I did entertain thee:/Has thou put on his shape to do him shame?" (596-97). For Lucretia, the marriage between truth and the visual is so concretely bound that she no longer believes that Tarquin is himself, because she has entirely associated his form with trustworthiness. As Shakespeare describes Lucretia's adamant belief in a visual/veracious correlation, he simultaneously demonstrates the falseness of this pairing in the character of Tarquin.

Lucretia's confidence in her faulty supposition remains intact even after her encounter with Tarquin, for when she is wronged, Lucretia believes that her disgrace will be written on her countenance. She cries, "Then my digression is so vile, so base,/That it will live engraven in my face" (202-03). Although her shame is not immediately physically apparent, (the messenger she calls does not read the crime in her look, even though she imagines that he does (1342-44)), Lucretia's despair eventually ravages her beauty: "Her lively colour kill'd with deadly cares" (1593). This transformation follows Lucretia's contemplation of the Fall of Troy painting, which awakens her to the deceptive power of the visual. As Lucretia acquires an understanding of visual chicanery, her own appearance undergoes a journey from unchanging to reflective of her anguished mental state. Lucretia's initial naiveté emphasizes how fully her character opposes that of Tarquin. Shakespeare seems to conceive of the two as allegorical figures for the dual

nature of the visual, its deception and its veracity. Additionally, Shakespeare demonstrates the illuminating potential of the visual arts through the influence of the painting on Lucretia.

By inserting the discussion of the Fall of Troy painting into his poem, Shakespeare adds the power of painting to his more general investigation of the visual. At first Lucretia merely recalls the work; its intricate composition and dramatic scenes:

*At last she calls to mind where hangs a piece  
Of skilful painting, made for Priam's Troy, (1366-67)  
....A thousand lamentable objects there,  
In scorn of nature, art gave lifeless life:  
Many a dry drop seem'd a weeping tear,  
Shed for the slaughter'd husband by the wife;  
The red blood reek'd to show the painter's strife,  
And dying eyes gleam'd forth their ashy lights,  
Like dying coals burnt out in tedious nights. (1373-79)*

Following the poet's extensive description of the painting's appearance, Lucretia goes to the work itself and examines its depiction of human emotion. She studies among others the compelling figures of Priam, Hecuba, and Sinon. Their emotional displays fascinate her and facilitate Lucretia's reflections upon her own experiences.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Many arguments center on whether this work is a tapestry or a painted cloth—Shakespeare does not conclusively say. F.T. Prince questions the very existence of the work: “Most of these arguments depend on the assumption that Shakespeare could not have written his description without having seen a picture or tapestry which would supply him with every detail he mentions. This remarkable supposition is used to ‘prove’ that *Lucrece* could not have been written before Shakespeare came to London, or that he must have visited the Low Countries or Italy. In fact the passage is very literary, both in conception and execution...it evokes a picture that would be impossible in reality and whose supposed master indicates a somewhat naïve taste by the writer.” (Prince, *Poems*, footnote 1366-7, 128). Prince is overly hasty in suggesting that such a painting would be impossible; many artists have been able to compose works cluttered with multiple scenes, enormous casts of characters, and unlikely compositions such as Bosch, Uccello, and Michelangelo. Furthermore, there are many prints depicting the Fall of Troy with which Shakespeare may have been familiar. While none depicts a composition as grand or complex as that of Lucretia's work, some prints exhibit an assemblage of frantic soldiers and twisting bodies that Shakespeare may have found inspiring (see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 508; vol. 33, 371; vol. 36, 66). In light of the subtext of this poem, it is doubtful that Shakespeare could have maintained the visual ignorance that Prince alleges. I myself am uninterested in whether Shakespeare was inspired by an actual work of art (a situation that has thus far appeared unprovable), and I am even less compelled to debate the material support of any work

When she first looks at the figure of deceitful Sinon in the work, “Such signs of truth in his plain face she spied,/That she concluded that picture was belied” (1532-33). But after recalling Tarquin’s specious looks, Lucretia re-examines Sinon’s face and declares, “It cannot be, I find,/But such a face should bear a wicked mind” (1541-42). The painting, thus, reveals to her that the visual may deceive, and as a result, the educative power of the visual arts is highlighted; the painting enables Lucretia’s revelation when other visual and verbal evidence have failed to do so. This passage, Shakespeare’s only overt exploration of the arts in *Lucrece*, celebrates the ability of painting to reveal knowledge through visual perception, leading to a more complete understanding of reality. It is, as David Rosand observes, “Shakespeare’s fullest expression of the affective theory of painting,” in its portrayal of painting’s ability to aid understanding and influence human behavior.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout *Lucrece* Shakespeare represents the interaction of the visual and the verbal as both competitive and cooperative. The competitive aspect of the Renaissance *ut pictura poesis* discussion is relevant to the passages in which the verbal and the visual are presented as vying for position as the more descriptive mode. *Ut pictura poesis* referred specifically to the arts of painting and poetry, but the interplay of verbal and visual elements in *Lucrece* can be seen as relating to that dialogue, inasmuch as it enacts the same comparisons of the senses and of descriptive modes in more general terms. For instance, Shakespeare takes no pains to disguise his characters’ loss of words at key

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that conceivably inspired him. The only description Shakespeare provides is that the work is “painted” (1367; 1443), though, as many have pointed out, in the Elizabethan age ‘painted’ was used to describe anything finely wrought with color (Hulse, “Skilful Painting,” 15). Yet, Shakespeare also refers to the artist as a “painter” (1450;1461), and without any information to the contrary, I believe we should take the poet at his word.

<sup>13</sup> David Rosand, “‘Troyes Painted Woes’: Shakespeare and the Pictorial Imagination,” *The Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 90.

emotional moments; instead, he deliberately defers to a visual description of their states of being. This phenomenon can be observed in the scene of disclosure and suicide, when Lucretia confides in Collatine and his comrades about her terrible ordeal. Shakespeare describes Lucretia's appearance to her returning husband in pictorial terms: "Who finds his Lucrece clad in mourning black,/And round about her tear-distained eye/Blue circles stream'd like rainbows in the sky" (1585-87). Her grief is first apparent to him through her physical demeanor. As Lucretia is bereft of words to describe her experience, Shakespeare relies on the visual to convey her grief. Similarly, when Collatine attempts to reply to the news of his wife's rape, he is struck dumb. Shakespeare writes:

*From lips new-waxen pale begins to blow  
The grief away that stops his answer so;  
But wretched as he is, he strives in vain:  
What he breathes out his breath drinks up again. (1663-66)  
...The deep vexation of his inward soul  
Hath serv'd a dumb arrest upon his tongue. (1779-80)*

Both Lucretia and Collatine have found themselves at a loss for words, leaving their physical forms to relate their agitation.

Shakespeare is not merely recording a visibly registered emotion in these passages, but instead seems to be emulating the painter through his evocation of stirring visual imagery. As S. Clark Hulse explains, "The highest form of skill, then, is to surpass the limits of your material and achieve the perfection of the rival art."<sup>14</sup> For example, after Lucretia's suicide, Shakespeare's imagery insinuates that Collatine briefly contemplates joining her in death: "...In key-cold Lucrece's bleeding steam/He falls, and bathes the pale fear in his face,/And counterfeits to die with her a space" (1774-76). The moving image evoked through the poet's lines is as stirring as any speech Collatine could

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<sup>14</sup> Hulse, "Skilful Painting," 16.

have made. Here Shakespeare is employing what Patricia Parker defines as “a form of description known as *enargeia* or *evidentia*, a display or unfolding in language so vivid that it provides a substitute for ‘ocular proof’.”<sup>15</sup> In these passages, the rival abilities of the visual and verbal to relate emotion echo the competition between painting and poetry.

To further examine the poet’s use of these two descriptive modes, we return to Shakespeare’s description of the painting of the Fall of Troy. He devotes in excess of two-hundred lines to the praise of a work of art, a tour de force that illuminates his own skill as a poet. The first seventy-six lines are the poet’s description of the work that Lucretia recalls (“She calls to mind where hangs a piece/Of skilful painting” (1366-67)). They are not Lucretia’s own recollections, nor do they describe, as do subsequent passages, Lucretia’s direct observations. Instead, the initial description is the poet-narrator’s verbal reconstruction of the work, and is addressed to the reader. These lines describe at length the emotional realism of the painting:

*There might you see the labouring pioneer  
Begrin’d with sweat and smeared with dust;  
And from the towers of Troy there would appear  
The very eyes of men through loop-holes thrust,  
Gazing upon the Greeks with little lust:  
Such sweet observance in this work was had,  
That one might see those far-off eyes look sad. (1380-1386)*

When he writes, “art gave lifeless life” (1374), Shakespeare is commenting upon the successful illusionism of the painting, but implicitly refers as well to his own ability to animate the work of art though words. Hulse, rejecting the arguments of Da Vinci’s *Paragone*, believes that Shakespeare’s *ekphrastic* passage alone secures poetry’s superiority to painting in that Shakespeare’s pictorial description exceeds painting in its

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<sup>15</sup> Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 138.



ability to evoke emotion and rival nature. He writes, “Shakespeare perfectly fulfills the goal of the paragone in his Troy-piece, with the variety of its action and vividness of emotion.”<sup>16</sup> By directly addressing the art of painting in his poem, Shakespeare involves himself in the discussion of *ut pictura poesis* with the evident purpose of flaunting his poetical skills.

While these aspects of *Lucrece* do relate to Renaissance comparisons of the two arts, determining the supremacy of poetry does not seem to be Shakespeare’s chief interest; instead, he frequently uses the visual and the verbal in concert, as complimentary descriptive elements. In this and other passages, Shakespeare takes pains to establish the symbiotic relationship between the visual and the verbal. Standing at length before the painting, Lucretia contemplates the figure of inconsolable Hecuba, who grieves over the corpse of her murdered husband Priam. Lucretia notes that the figure, while impeccably rendered, has no words by which to relieve her sadness:

*The painter was no god to lend her those,  
And therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong,  
To give her so much grief, and not a tongue.*

*“Poor instrument,” quoth she, “without a sound,  
I’ll tune they woes with my lamenting tongue.” (1461-65)*

It seems by Lucretia’s account that the painting is not complete in its realism, for the suffering figures it depicts lack a verbal outlet for their sorrow. As Lucretia supplies speech for the figure, she effectively illustrates the complimentary relationship between painting and poetry. In exchange, Lucretia learns from the work’s figures to adopt a countenance that reflects her emotion, a skill she had assumed native but that had previously eluded her. “So Lucrece set a-work, sad tales doth tell/To pencill’d

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<sup>16</sup> Hulse, *Skilful Painting*, 18.

pensiveness and colour'd sorrow:/She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow" (1496-98). Here Shakespeare shows a happy marriage of looks and sounds. The verbose Lucretia and the emotionally-charged painting engage in a mutually beneficial relationship. In this way, Shakespeare utilizes the painting as a tool for understanding reality; in life, visual and verbal elements combine to form a complete expression of emotion.

The most convincing examples of Shakespeare's belief in the complementary nature of the visual and the verbal can be found where he himself dramatically employs them together. Tarquin's progress towards Lucretia's bedchamber encounters series of physical barriers. It is also a progress through visual and aural obstructions. As the villain approaches Lucretia's room, his noisy advance declares his trespass. Tarquin forces the locks upon her door, "but as they open, they all rate his ill" (304). Also, "the threshold grates the door to have him heard;/Night wand'ring weasels shriek to see him there" (306-07). In addition to sounds that hinder his advance, visual obstacles also impair Tarquin. "The wind wars with his torch to make him stay,/And blows the smoke of it into his face/Extinguishing his conduct in this case" (311-13). Sound and light have colluded in this passage both to delay Tarquin and also to signal the suspenseful approach of the crime that nature itself seems to distain. Shakespeare pits the truthful factions of the visual and the auditory against Tarquin's deception.

During the subsequent rape scene Lucretia, convinced that the veracity of her words and appearance will compel Tarquin to desist, implores her attacker, "If ever man were mov'd with woman's moans,/Be moved with my tears, my sighs, my growns" (587-88). After Tarquin, impervious to her physical and verbal pleas, rapes her, Lucretia

cannot comprehend the disjunction between her truthful self-representation and the deception of Tarquin. Through art's enlightening power, discovered through her examination of the Fall of Troy painting, Lucretia comes to comprehend the deceptive character of Tarquin's appearance and strengthens her appreciation for the true marriage of appearance and words. Lucretia outlines her vehement belief in the truth of her own behavior in a soliloquy addressed to Collatine. She declares:

*I will not poison thee with my attaint,  
Nor fold my fault in cleanly-coin'd excuses;  
My sable ground of sin I will not paint,  
To hide the truth of this false night's abuses.  
My tongue shall utter all, mine eyes like sluices,  
As from a mountain-spring that feeds a dale,  
Shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale. (1072-78)*

In this stanza, Lucretia clearly states that her words and looks are entirely fused in their veracity, a unity reflected in the painterly terms "ground" and "paint" that punctuate her synesthetic speech. In refusing to visually or verbally mask her true state, Lucretia rejects the deceptive tactics of Tarquin and fully commits herself to truthful representation. Later, when Collatine sees his wife's face, which the poet describes as "that map which deep impression bears/Of hard misfortune" (1712-13), he implores her to "unmask, dear dear, this moody heaviness,/And tell they grief, that we may give redress" (1602-03). He has not come to understand the powerful connection between Lucretia's words and form as the reader has. Though Collatine pleads his wife to "unmask," her face tells of her ordeal as completely as her words.

Shakespeare carries this coupling to the end, concluding his poem with the twin powers of vision and rhetoric. Brutus, who had been known "for sportive words and utt'ring foolish things" (1813), is enraged by the heroine's death. After his stirring

oration to the crowd of onlookers, rousing their support, they join him in his pledge for revenge. Nevertheless, to enact their campaign, the soldiers do not shout in the streets or disseminate the truth through words. Instead, “they did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence,/To show her bleeding body through Rome,/And so to publish Tarquin’s foul offense” (1850-52). By using the visual to “publish” Lucretia’s tale, Shakespeare concludes his work with a powerful message: when the verbal and the visual are joined, their combined ability to persuade and evoke emotion is far greater than the sum of its parts.

In this poem, Shakespeare utilizes Lucretia’s story to explore the “sister” arts of painting and poetry within a larger investigation of the nature of the visual and the verbal.<sup>17</sup> He explores their abilities to influence human perception through their strengths, weaknesses, and veracity. Most significantly, Shakespeare employs the two descriptive modes in a complimentary fashion. When combined, these elements constitute a philosophical subtext that advocates the cooperative use of the verbal and the visual. What might have inspired Shakespeare to elect Lucretia as the vehicle for this

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<sup>17</sup> While this project is chiefly involved with the subtext of the poem’s language, Joel Fineman’s 1987 essay, “Shakespeare’s will: the Temporality of Rape,” explores the poem’s visual aspects in terms of its physical form of the page. Of the arguments he presents, Fineman’s most intriguing discussion focuses on Shakespeare’s repeated use of the “cross-coupling chiasmus” throughout *Lucrece*. For example, he dissects the first line of the second stanza, “Happ’ly that name of “chaste” unhapp’ly set” (8), which “enforces a strangely performative correspondence between the poem’s matter and its manner.” Fineman, “Shakespeare’s will,” 32. A primary interest of his essay is Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the appearance of the written word, or combinations of words on the page. Therefore, in the above line, Shakespeare mirrors the repetition of syllables with a visual symmetry. While Fineman’s argument is too complex to reiterate in full, it dovetails nicely with the present discussion; that is, both advocate a reading of Shakespeare’s poem as engaging with both visual and verbal modes. Shakespeare uses *Lucrece* to discuss the nature of the visual and evoke striking imagery through language; experimentation with the appearance of his work as a physical object is a logical outgrowth of this project. His chosen profession allowed him to combine a brilliant linguistic adeptness with what must have been a keen visual savvy. Deprived of a stage, Shakespeare’s poem could replicate the duality of the theater in miniature, with words carefully positioned under the proscenium of the title page.

discussion? The following sections will explore Shakespeare's possible literary and visual sources.

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Since antiquity, writers and artists have been fascinated with the story of Lucretia. Through their various interpretive lenses, she has been charged with moral, political, and erotic valences. Shakespeare's earliest education would have equipped him with Latin literacy, enabling his access to the classical authors who wrote the earliest accounts of Lucretia's story, primarily Livy and Ovid.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Painter's English translation of Livy's *Historia* was available from 1566. While little is known with absolute certainty about Shakespeare, much can be surmised from the handful of surviving records from his lifetime and what little is known about his family, homes, and companions. When Shakespeare was a child in Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1570's, he would have attended a typical Elizabethan school that derived its curriculum almost entirely from the study of Latin: its memorization, recitation, translation, and composition. Though some families lacked the resources to allow a child's absence from the family business to say nothing of the expense of school supplies, Shakespeare, as the son of a luxury glove-maker as well as local civil servant, would have certainly been encouraged to attend school.<sup>19</sup> It is reasonable to assume that like other boys, Shakespeare spent his youth poring over Latin texts under the urgent threat of corporeal punishment, while looking forward to the

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<sup>18</sup> Many ancient writers provided accounts of Lucretia's story. Those of Livy and Ovid are most often repeated and show the greatest influence on Shakespeare's account, but other versions exist such as those by Plutarch and Dio Cassius. For more information on classical accounts of Lucretia see Donaldson, *Rapes*, 5-12.

<sup>19</sup> Shakespeare's father rose steadily in prominence from constable up the ladder to bailiff and finally to chief alderman in 1571. It was not until Shakespeare's early teenage years that John Shakespeare fell sharply out of both political and financial good-standing. For more information of the life and decline of John Shakespeare, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), with particular attention to pages 58-67.

possible reward of an afternoon enacting a classical comedy by Plautus or Terence, plays that no doubt shaped his later theatrical endeavors.<sup>20</sup>

Livy and Ovid's accounts constitute the totemic classical versions of Lucretia's story, the Livy being the most commonly referenced, although Shakespeare seems to have relied more heavily on Ovid. Centuries later, Chaucer gave his own account of Lucretia, which Shakespeare, as any Englishman with literary ambition, would certainly have known. The aforementioned authors were certainly not the only to recount the story of Lucretia. From the Middle Ages, her purity was debated by Christian theologians who denounced her suicide but admired her character. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Giovanni Boccaccio wrote her story. Lucretia even gained mention in Dante's *Inferno* (Canto IV, line 118). In the early sixteenth century, Machiavelli discussed the political ramification of Brutus's actions in his *Discourses* and provided a comic incarnation of Lucretia in *Mandragola*. A few years later, Sir Thomas Elyot briefly mentioned the story's political consequences in his 1531 educational treatise *The Boke Named the Gouernour*.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the three accounts explored here appear to have been most available and most influential to Shakespeare. As the story evolves from Livy to Ovid to Chaucer, the visual and the verbal elements play an increasingly significant role. No doubt, Shakespeare viewed his own work as a natural outgrowth of this development.

Discrepancies amongst accounts are commonplace; the versions of Livy, Ovid, and Chaucer all have individuating characteristics. Livy, writing as a Roman historian, makes the greatest attempt to contextualize the incident. He represents Lucretia's story

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<sup>20</sup> On Elizabethan grammar school education see Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare For All Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11-15. Wells notes in particular the impact of Latin comedies on Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (12).

<sup>21</sup> See Donaldson, *Rapes*. Donaldson presents a discussion of Machiavelli's thoughts on Lucretia (90-94) as well as Elyot's account (105).

as a wholly factual account of great political significance. The rape is not the pivotal moment of his story, but rather the ousting of the Tarquin line and its political consequences. His version begins with a description of Tarquin's father's misdeeds. The eventual exile of the Tarquins is therefore a logical culmination to the story in a way not evident in any other version. Livy's account also reveals an attention to historical detail in its description of the events that unfold subsequent to Lucretia's rape. Immediately following the assault, Lucretia calls her father and husband to her side. Each man arrives with one companion, the father Lucretius brings Valerius, son of Volesius, and Collatine arrives with Junius Brutus. The foursome attend Lucretia as she utters her final words, which urge the men to exact revenge on Tarquin, and it is under her recommendation that they do so. She proclaims the famous words, "No unchast or ill woman, shall hereafter impute no dishonest act to Lucrece" (195).<sup>22</sup> Then, she slays herself with a knife produced from her girdle. Livy gives a lengthy account of the events that follow. Though Shakespeare was certainly acquainted with this early form of the story and likely looked to it as a resource for his own work, he omits all but the most rudimentary mention of the historical context, and instead amply augments the narrative in other areas. Most strikingly, while Livy represents a composed and lucid Lucretia who immediately notifies her husband and father of her assault, Shakespeare's Lucretia debates that very decision for over 550 lines!

Shakespeare's poem draws most generously on Ovid's retelling, which appears in *Fasti* (AD 8), a poetic compendium of Roman historical and mythological stories arranged according to the calendar. In contrast to his predecessor, Ovid compresses the requisite political context and places a greater focus on the figure of Lucretia: her beauty,

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<sup>22</sup> T. Livius, *Historia* translated in Painter, *The Pallace of Pleasure* (1566); rpt. in Prince, *Poems*, 195.

nobility, and violation. In its overt interest in titillation, the eroticism of Ovid's retelling both diminishes its historic reliability and provides a chauvinistic, male narrative voice. As in many of Ovid's tales of rape, the attractiveness of the woman is heightened by her distress.<sup>23</sup> For example, the narrator describes of Lucretia how "her modest teares were charming"(757).<sup>24</sup> The implication is not that they appear so to Tarquin alone, but to all who witness her distress. In abandoning the literal, historical tone of Livy, Ovid heightens the narrative magnetism and poetic potential of Lucretia's story thereby allowing future authors to treat the subject in a literary rather than historical manner. In the process, the poet transfers ownership of the story from Tarquin, Brutus, or Rome to Lucretia; in the majority of future images and retellings the narrative centers around her acts and feelings.

Shakespeare finds inspiration in Ovid's rhetorical threads that emphasize the significance of the visual and the verbal in Lucretia's tale. Throughout his poem, Ovid promotes a concept of the face as a transparent window to the soul. Upon this precept, one who wishes to conceal his true intentions or depth of feeling, must cover his face. Therefore, when Tarquin visits Lucretia's home on his wicked errand, his countenance is disguised, seemingly with the aid of the setting sun. Ovid writes, "Collatia admitted the young man through its bronze gate/ as the sun was ready to hide its face" (785-6). The turned face of the sun suggests that Tarquin's crime will be invisible, occurring without scrutiny or witness. While Tarquin later receives his just deserts in exile, the ominous

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<sup>23</sup> Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rape" from *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 162. Richlin points out that similar relationships between attractiveness and fear or despair can be found in Ovid's accounts of Daphne, Leucothoe, Europa, and the Sabines.

<sup>24</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Fasti*, trans. by Betty Rose Nagle (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 77. All quotations of Ovid are from this source.



subtext helps build dramatic tension. These lines clearly inspired Shakespeare's passage on Tarquin's approach to Lucretia's bedroom, though he reverses the influence of the elements on Tarquin through the wind and the light that impede his advancement. Shakespeare found additional inspiration for his discussion of visual veracity in Ovid's assumptions about the honesty of the face. Later in the *Fasti* version, when Lucretia's father and husband question her about the origin of her distress, "She kept still a long time, modestly veiling her face" before attempting to answer (819). It seems that if she had allowed them full view, no verbal explanation would have been necessary.

As a foil to his reigning principle that 'seeing is believing,' Ovid repeatedly shows that words are frequently inadequate for relating the truth. At the outset of the poem, the competition that sets the narrative wheel spinning is the result of Collatine's urging to end the boasting of the soldiers and to observe their wives directly. He declares, "No need for words; rely on the fact" (733-34). Collatine's words indicate that visual confirmation trumps verbal description. Later, when Lucretia so urgently needs to relate her assault to her father and husband, she finds herself bereft of words appropriate to the task. Ovid writes, "Three times she tried to speak and failed" (823). While Shakespeare nearly transcribes these words into his poem ("Three times with sighs she gives her sorrow fire,/Ere once she can discharge one word of woe" (1604-05)), his overall attitude towards the truth-telling power of words and faces is more complicated than Ovid's. Unlike the Roman poet who merely punctuates his tale with such descriptions, Shakespeare expands this tension between the visual and the verbal to an ongoing theme that ribbons throughout his poem.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Shakespeare borrows so substantially from Ovid that it is easy to imagine that he intended for readers to note his source. Gordon Williams, *Shakespeare, Sex and the Print Revolution* (London and Atlantic

The final written account of Lucretia that significantly influenced Shakespeare is that of Chaucer, which appears in *The Legende of Good Women*. In his version of the story, Chaucer finalizes the shift begun by Ovid to a Lucretia-centric narrative. He declares at the outset of the poem that he is not as preoccupied as his predecessors had been with the deeds and exiles of kings, but with the figure of Lucretia. The poem opens:

*Now mote I seyn the exilynge of kynges  
Of Rome, for here horrible doings,  
And of the laste kyng Tarquinius,  
As seyth Ovyde and Titus Lyvius.  
But for to preyse and drawe to memorye  
The verray wif, the verray treue Lucresse (lines 1680-86)*

Here Chaucer self-consciously positions his text in the lineage of tales of Lucretia and in doing so, recognizes the heroine's virtue as an established literary *topos*. Whereas Ovid flirted with visual veracity as a metaphorical framework for his version, Chaucer fully develops this theme in his account. Additionally, Chaucer introduces the power of words as a complimentary force to the power of the visual. From Ovid, Chaucer takes Collatine's declaration that the soldiers should rely on visual proof to settle their debate. However, Chaucer adds words to the litany of Lucretia's beautiful aspects that intoxicate Tarquin:

*Tarquinius, this proude kynges sone,  
Conceyved hath hire beaute and hyre cheere,  
Hire yelwe her, hire shap, and hire manere,  
Hire hew, hire wordes, that she hath compleyned  
(And by no craft hire beaute nas nat feyned),  
And caughte to this lady swich desyr  
That in his herte brende as any fyr  
So wodly that his wit was all forgenten." (1745-52)*

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Highlands, New Jersey: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1996), 119: "Neo-Ovidian poems were designed to give pleasure to those who knew the original; and a refined pleasure in this case might come from recognition of how the context in which Ovid places the story has left its impress on Shakespeare's poem."

So Lucretia's charm has left Tarquin witless; that is, wordless and without reason. Yet beauty here has not defeated Tarquin's words alone, for he is also left without a visual faculty as Chaucer describes his "blind lust" (1756). Rather than the visual triumphing over the verbal, it is shown that beauty can obliterate all faculties.

In Chaucer's version of the rape scene words also have the power to leave one senseless. Tarquin threatens Lucretia with death and, most persuasively, defamation. He describes how he will slay her and lay her with a slave, "And thus thow shalt be ded, and also lese/Thy name, for thow shalt non other chese" (1810-11). Chaucer explains the power of Tarquin's threat to slander Lucretia in the lines that follow:

*These Romeyn wyves lovede so here name  
At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame  
That, what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth,  
She loste bothe at ones wit and breth" (1812-15)*

The influential power of words is here most evident in the ability of Tarquin's defamatory lies to excite Lucretia's fear of losing her name, which has always represented her chastity and honor. Seemingly, she loves her good name over herself, for in Chaucer's retelling her fear of slander precedes her fear of death, leaving her as witless as her beauty rendered Tarquin. Later, Lucretia justifies her intended suicide with essentially the same reasoning. "She sayde that, for hir gylt ne for hir blame,/Hir husbonde shulde nat have the foule name,/That wolde she nat suffer, by no wey" (1844-46). And so, the visual and verbal seem to have equal effects, both Lucretia's beauty and Tarquin's threats have the power to leave the recipient senseless. In the final portion of the poem, Brutus uses both verbal and visual persuasion to rally the populace to avenge Lucretia's death. They decide to carry Lucretia's body throughout the town, so that "men may see and here/The horrible dede of hir oppressyoun" (1862-68).

Here and there in Chaucer's account one may find chinks in the proffered equality between the visual and the verbal. At times he seems to momentarily favor one form over the other, but without explanation. For instance, when Collatine has come away with his fellow soldiers having just glimpsed Lucretia, he wanders alone, recalling what he has seen. "Unto the sege he cometh ful privily,/And by himself he walketh soberly,/Th'ymage of hir recordyng alwey newe" (1758-60). The language here implies that Lucretia's visage is reinventing itself of its own volition. Chaucer grants an autonomy to images here that he never affords to words in his account. Additionally, whereas words may deceive in Chaucer's retelling, such as the lies with which Tarquin threatens Lucretia, the visual is consistently truthful. In an early passage, the author explains how Lucretia's face faithfully reflects her character. He describes, "Hyre contenance is to hire herte dygne,/For they acorde both in dede and sygne" (1734-39). Whereas in Livy and Ovid's accounts Tarquin is visibly false to Lucretia when he visits her home under the guise of a friendly guest, Chaucer evades this issue by editing the plot. In his version, the attacker sneaks into Lucretia's home under the cover of darkness and slips into her bedroom. Therefore, here too the truth of the visual is maintained.

These points seem to be minor discrepancies in an overall unified and balanced description of complimentary modes. Chaucer's texts were often recited as well as read, and with the limitations of literacy during his time, he could not have anticipated that his audience would be able to study his texts at length, as Shakespeare's readers would later do.<sup>26</sup> However Shakespeare did pick up on these passages, and in his own account, he investigates their subtle allusions to the competing powers of the visual and the verbal.

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<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. A. Kent Hieatt and Constance Hieatt (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), ix-x. "His work did not reach people through printed books but was recited and circulated in manuscript copies..."

Between the Ovid and Chaucer versions he finds ample literary precedent for his exploration of the power of these complimentary modes in Lucretia's tale.

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Artists as well as writers were interested in the story of Lucretia. Though it is hard to imagine that Shakespeare saw any notable paintings of the subject, he may have been familiar with some of the many prints of Lucretia created during the Renaissance. While the tale enjoyed popularity from Roman times, interest surrounding Lucretia's story surged during the cinquecento. Through his fascination with Lucretia, Pope Leo X spearheaded this movement, which Wolfgang Stechow refers to as "a cult of the Roman heroine."<sup>27</sup> During this period, depictions of Lucretia emphasized the statuesque qualities of the figure, as evidenced by Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael and by Sodoma's paintings, one of which prompted the Pope to name the artist *cavaliere*.<sup>28</sup> Later Venetian works stress the corporeality of Lucretia, as seen in Titian's vivid rape scene (Figure 5) and Paolo Veronese's sensual depiction of suicide (Figure 3). Northern European depictions of Lucretia, such as those by Heinrich Aldegrever (Figure 6) and the workshop of Lucas Cranach, while to some extent inspired by their Italian counter-parts, are frequently concerned with overtly pornographic content.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Stechow speculates that the Pope's interest might have been inspired by the preponderance of women named Lucretia in the Medici family, as well as by the excavation of an antique Lucretia sculpture in Rome during his lifetime. Wolfgang Stechow, "Lucretiae Statua," in Essays in Honor of Georg Swarzenski, compiled by Oswald Goetz (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co. in cooperation with Berlin: Verlag Gebr. Mann, 1951), 116-18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 121-22. Images of Sodoma's *Lucretia* (Hanover, Kestner-Museum) and *Lucretia* (Budapest, Private Collection) as well as Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael can be found in Stechow, "Lucretia," 117; 121; 119, respectively. However, Stechow does not believe either of these Sodoma works to be the one praised by Leo X.

<sup>29</sup> A discussion of the thirty-seven Lucretia paintings by Lucas Cranach and his workshop can be found in Linda C. Hults, "Dürer's Lucretia: Speaking the Silence of Women," *Signs* 16.2 (1991): 205-37.

Shakespeare, who came into adulthood at the end of the Renaissance, inherited a complex version of Lucretia's story, made knotty and contradictory by centuries of widely varying interpretations. In the Elizabethan era, prints were brought to London by traders and booksellers, as well as by immigrants and continental artists.<sup>30</sup> Most obviously, Shakespeare's connection to his patron Henry Wriothesely, the Earl of Southampton, would have afforded him access to many luxuries typically beyond the reach of a lowly playwright. Most scholars are in agreement that the relationship between patron and poet grew in intimacy between the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and that of *Lucrece* a year later. It is unclear when Shakespeare and Southampton first met, but it may have been backstage at a play.<sup>31</sup> Wriothesely, a notably enthusiastic theatergoer, may have extended an invitation to the increasingly renowned playwright for a more private meeting. A second plausible explanation for their acquaintance results from the increasing annoyance of Wriothesely's mother at her son's unwillingness to marry Elizabeth Vere, granddaughter of Lord Burghley, Wriothesely's legal guardian since his father's death. Burghley had in the past commissioned persuasive poems to

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558—1625* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 5. Wells-Cole quotes W.J. Ivens on the importance of prints in Elizabethan England: "When Elizabeth I came to the throne of England, prints had become 'the standard medium for passing visual information and artistic themes across geographical distances.'" (4) During this era in England, art works were available and collected, though comparatively the general interest in cultivating aesthetic taste was not as high as elsewhere in Europe. Leonard Barkan sternly appraises the situation: "By any European—and not only Italian—standards, the real level of visual culture in Elizabethan England was astonishingly low." Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak," 331. Nevertheless, artworks were available for people with keen visual interests like Shakespeare.

<sup>31</sup> G.P.V. Akrigg, *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 193. Akrigg gives a far lengthier list of hypotheses. He concludes the litany with his own addition: "If the present writer must add his own guess as to where and when Shakespeare and Southampton first met, he would suggest a backstage meeting in a London playhouse sometime in 1591-92."

needle his bachelor ward.<sup>32</sup> Shakespeare could easily have been mentioned as one of a handful of popular writers in the London theatrical circle who could satisfy Burghley's need for a messenger poet.

In any case, the relationship seemingly became more intimate between 1593 and 1594, the period in which Shakespeare wrote *Lucrece*. The 1593 forward to *Venus and Adonis* is quite formal and self-effacing in tone. The poet writes:

*I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpublished  
lines to your Lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing  
so strong a prop to support so weak a burden. Only, if your Honour  
seems but pleased, I account myself highly praised; and vow to take  
advantage of all idle hours.*

The tone of this introduction is characteristic of dedications written for poems of this era. Despite the described opportunities for introduction, it is even possible that Shakespeare still had not met Southampton when he wrote these lines. Like other poets before him, Shakespeare may have dedicated the poem to the lord in the hope of acquiring a patron without the benefit of a more familiar connection. Regardless of when introductions occurred, the nature of their relationship had changed by the dedication of the second poem. Shakespeare begins, "The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end...What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours." Many scholars believe that Southampton was in fact the youth to which the earliest sonnets were dedicated.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A secretary of Burghley, John Clapham composed a poem, *Narcissus*, which urged the Earl to marry. It was offered to Southampton in 1591. It would seem that the poem was ineffective, as the Earl refused Burghley's granddaughter, suffering a substantial financial loss as a consequence. See Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, 229.

<sup>33</sup> Discussions of the evidence for an identification of Southampton as the youth of the sonnets are found in Akrigg, *Southampton*; Martin Green, *Wriothesley's Roses*, In *Shakespeare's Sonnets, Poems and Plays* (Baltimore, Maryland: Clevedon Books, 1993); and Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *The Life of Henry, Third Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's Patron* (New York: AMS Press, 1922).

Shakespeare's friendship with the printer Richard Field, a fellow Stratfordian with his own workshop in London, may have also allowed him access to prints. Field's successful business in London engaged with the international book and print trade centered there.<sup>34</sup> While, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, Shakespeare seemed utterly uninterested in amassing a shelf of his own printed work, it is evident from his writing that he was an avid reader. Additionally, he was an unfortunate victim of libel.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, self-interest necessitated a knowledge of the latest goings-on in the commercial world of printing. There is no evidence that Shakespeare ever purchased either books or artworks, even at the height of his wealth.<sup>36</sup> Yet, this lack of records only more strongly suggests that Shakespeare's library and art objects were never documented. It is impossible to imagine so great a reader as Shakespeare without the possession of a book collection. Likewise, it is difficult to suppose that a man who came to own significant property and a house in Stratford never purchased a painting or a print. All evidence, particularly the intense discussion of art found in *Lucrece*, argues against it.

If and when Shakespeare examined prints of Lucretia, the poet would have been struck by the way in which many works eagerly reinvent narrative moments and rearrange chronology, as evidenced by the numerous Lucretias who contemplate their suicidal weapons alone and naked in their bedrooms, though all accounts indicate that the suicide was performed before a group of observers (Figure 10-11). Such improvisations were predicated upon the same license taken by their literary predecessors. In observing

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<sup>34</sup> Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, 193-94.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 229. Greenblatt writes, "Even though as a poet Shakespeare dreamed of eternal fame, he does not seem to have associated that fame with the phenomenon of the printed book." Shakespeare was targeted in Robert Green's posthumously published comic text, *Green's Goratsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance*.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 330. Greenblatt writes, "There is no evidence—as there is, for example, with Ben Jonson or John Donne—that Shakespeare laid out his money for books (let alone for paintings, or antique coins, or small bronzes, or indeed for any other object of learning or art.)



their free handling of Lucretia's history, Shakespeare would have felt liberated to make his own alterations.

The conventional story of Lucretia imagery begins with Medieval works, usually illuminations attached to a moralizing text. In large part, these early images and arguments are concerned with the validity of Lucretia's heroism in the Christian era. No clear doctrinal stance existed, and the division cleaved those who viewed her as a proto-saint from those who felt her suicide and lack of guilt marked her as decidedly pagan and not of Christian virtue.<sup>37</sup> Illustrating the former position, a 1404 illumination of Lucretia's suicide for Boccaccio's *De cleres et nobles femmes* reflects the author's belief that Lucretia was justified in preserving her "womanly honor" in its portrayal of all figures as uniformly sad but accepting of Lucretia's fate (Figure 1).<sup>38</sup> Concurrent with images that investigate Lucretia's morality are many others that either repackage the narrative, or explore the iconic or titillating potential of single-figure depiction of the heroine. Therefore, when discussing Lucretia imagery, a thematic rubric has traditionally been preferred over a chronological one.

In his 1951 essay "Lucretiae Statua," Wolfgang Stechow outlines a tripartite system of organizing the images. The categories are as follows: composite narrative scenes, rape scenes, and solitary figures of Lucretia in the process of taking her life.<sup>39</sup> Stechow cautions that these divisions are by no means equal in popularity or volume.

The first category is relatively short-lived, finding its most successful example in Sandro

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<sup>37</sup> The latter group followed the argument set out by St. Augustine. In his text *The City of God* (c.413), he accuses Lucretia of committing self-murder in her suicide. His pronouncements were still debated throughout the Renaissance. Defenders of Lucretia argued the moral ambiguity of suicide, as the Bible is without an overt condemnation of the act. For a discussion of Medieval attitudes towards Lucretia, see Donaldson, *Rapes*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The "Heroic" Tradition and Its Alternatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 143-44.

<sup>39</sup> Stechow, "Lucretiae," 114.

Botticelli's rendition (Figure 2). The second category reaches its height around the transition into the seventeenth-century, epitomized by Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* (Figure 5). The final category is explored in earnest from the outset of the sixteenth century in both full and half-length depictions.<sup>40</sup> While Shakespeare would not have been exposed to the composite composition of Botticelli's work, Titian's rape scene, or the lush sadism of Veronese's *Lucretia* (Figure 3), prints of Lucretia explore comparable issues.

An early 16<sup>th</sup> century engraving by Israhel van Mechenem shows a composite narrative account of Lucretia's tale (Figure 4). In the central scene Lucretia, dressed in the garb of the Renaissance elite, presses her body onto an enormous sword, which rests on the floor. Earlier scenes fill the liminal spaces of the print. Through a rear window, one can glimpse the treacherous Tarquin's arrival at Collatina with his retinue. An internal window on the left exposes a fully-clothed Tarquin assaulting a nude Lucretia. The ladder that enabled his access to the bedroom is seen poking through the window, a detail that suggests that Van Mechenem was not acquainted with either Livy or Ovid's account, which place Tarquin as a guest in Lucertia's home. As Diane Wolfthal notes in *Images of Rape: The "Heroic" Tradition and Its Alternatives*, the rape here is still de-emphasized by its relative scale and remote positioning.<sup>41</sup> The composition of this work, then, is narrative-driven.

In Van Mechenem's print, Lucretia's death is observed by a large gathering: the handmaids that support her and the soldiers that observe her death, far more witnesses than described in Livy or Ovid. Shakespeare also makes such a revision, as in his poem

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<sup>40</sup> The categories and their respective dates are discussed by Stechow, 114.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfthal, *Images of Rape*, 183.

Collatine is accompanied by “all his lordly crew” (1731) as well as by Lucretia’s father. In the Van Mechenem print no one intercedes, perhaps because, as Wolfthal emphasizes, much of medieval and early modern Lucretia imagery serves a didactic purpose, instructing viewers that a violated woman should take her own life. Wolfthal also argues that even erotic depictions of a disgraced Lucretia who “ecstatically” takes her life contain this underlying morality.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare upholds this moralizing component in his own work through Lucretia’s preoccupation with disgrace (747-756; 806-812; 1030-1036). In *Lucrece*, the heroine concludes that she must take her life to preserve her honor. Echoing Livy, Shakespeare’s Lucretia cries, “No dame hereafter living/By my excuse shall claim excuse’s giving” (1714-15). One can easily imagine this line as a caption for the present image.

In other works, the rape is the central locus of meaning and entertainment. While Shakespeare would not have seen either of Titian’s painted versions of the rape, he may easily have seen the prints by Heinrich Aldegrever, Giorgio Ghisi, and Agostino Veneziano that exhibit some of the same key elements of the Fitzwilliam Museum work. In Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucretia*, a fully clothed Tarquin assaults a semi reclining Lucretia on her bed (Figure 5).<sup>43</sup> He grasps her right forearm with his left hand, while with his right he brandishes a dagger. Lucretia, nude save for her exquisite earrings, necklace, and bracelets, presses her left hand against Tarquin’s chest. Her pose is ambiguous, and without the knife hovering above her, it would be difficult to say whether she was fending him off or reach towards an embrace. Tarquin’s knee intercedes

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 183-85. For example, Wolfthal describes a Lucas Cranach workshop painting (Mary Garrad, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, fig.182) that is inscribed: “Better to die than live in disgrace” (184).

<sup>43</sup> Titan’s second Lucretia painting “Lucretia and Her Consort, Tarquinius Collatinus” (c.1515) is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

between Lucretia's legs, although it does not appear that he has forced them apart. This arrangement of limbs combined with the knife suggests a far more graphic point in the assault. Tarquin's interceding knee as well as his hand on Lucretia's upstretched arm is also found in Aldegrever's earlier print of 1539 (Figure 6). The knee in fact is seemingly ubiquitous, appearing for example in Ghisi's print after Giulio Romano (Figure 7). The erotic ambiguity of Lucretia's gesture is maintained in spirit in an Agostino Veneziano print after Raphael (Figure 8).<sup>44</sup> In it a nude Tarquin lunges over Lucretia's whose left hand presses against his side while her right hand is concealed by his turned hips. In each of the abovementioned works but the Aldegrever, an interrupting male figure is present, though without a textual source, ostensibly representing the intrusion of the viewer's gaze on this crude scene.

Scholars have suggested that Shakespeare's poem tacitly reveals contact with at least one of these works in a line that describes the villain's entrance into Lucretia's bedchamber: "His guilty hand pluck'd up the latch,/And with his knee the door he opens wide" (358-9).<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the torch that blazes so prominently in the Veneziano and Ghisi works, may also have served as inspiration for the torch that represents Tarquin's lust in *Lucrece*. Before fully committing to his crime, Tarquin speaks to a torch as if addressing his own villainous passion: "Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not/To darken her whose light excelleth thine" (190-91). If this is the case, the torch blazing so fervently beside Lucretia's bed is an ominous reminder of the intensity of Tarquin's lust. Yet, if Shakespeare did lift these few passages from the prints, they are incidental and do

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<sup>44</sup> This plate was subsequently reworked by Enea Vico. Following Henry VIII's departure from the Catholic Church, London's access to Italian prints suffered. Nevertheless, Italian prints still maintained an influence in England. Prints arrived in the form of copies or through circuitous routes by way of France and Flanders. Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *Print Revolution*, 62.

not impact the overall tone of his account of the rape, which is one of rhetorical, not physical struggle.

Shakespeare would also have found multiple prints of Lucretia as a solitary figure, among them the c.1511 woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien (Figure 9) and Enea Vico's print after Parmigianino, *Lucretia Preparing to Kill Herself* (Figure 10). The popularity of these portrait-style works draws attention to the dearth of written accounts that explore Lucretia's psychological state, either through their deeply emotional renderings of Lucretia (Grien) or through their elimination of her despair in favor of placid beauty (Vico). Some single-figure depictions reduce Lucretia to either moral icon or pin-up, but others, such as Hans Brosamer's 1537 *Death of Lucretia*, offer a focused representation of Lucretia's state of being, which illuminates her tortured character in ways unexplored in literary accounts (Figure 11). While Shakespeare arguably overdoes his exploration of Lucretia's inner thoughts, his poem has to be viewed as an attempt to rectify this lack in the literature. Shakespeare delves into character, as Lucretia rationalizes, laments, and explains; *Lucrece's* accounts of both the rape and suicide are brief compared to the exhaustive exploration of the heroine's internal struggles. Shakespeare seems inspired foremost by the emotional intensity found in visual rather than written accounts of Lucretia.

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When the plague had closed the doors of every London theater in 1592, William Shakespeare found himself out of a job. Though he had enjoyed successes thus far in his career as a playwright, the financial rewards were not sufficient to sustain him without new work. Rather than return to the tedium and hardship of troupe acting, he turned to

poetry, and during the next two years he wrote the only poems in which he claimed the status of professional poet. Their subjects at first blush seem diametrically opposed. Shakespeare may have conceived *Venus and Adonis*, a foray into sensual mythology, and *Lucrece*, a classical tragedy, as foils from the outset. Yet surely many other tragic tales of chastity would have sufficiently countered the titillating *Venus and Adonis*.

For what other reasons might Shakespeare have turned to the subject of Lucretia? Political motivation has often inspired the retelling of Lucretia's story. Livy's account was likely meant to evoke the recent events concerning Julius Caesar, a leader whose potential tyranny was also circumvented by knife and patriotic Brutus.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the shift of Rome from tyranny to self-rule was a convenient metaphor for oppressed factions. In 1533, Heinrich Bullinger used his play *Lucretia* as a metaphor for Switzerland's recent political upheaval.<sup>47</sup> The Northern Netherlands also aligned itself metaphorically with ancient Rome during its Eighty-Years War with the Spanish monarchy. In 1609, the year of the signing of the Twelve Year's Truce between Spain and the newly proclaimed Dutch Republic, a theatrical incarnation of the story of Lucretia was presented to the Amsterdam public in an open-air theater on the Dam. An engraving by Claes Jansz. Visscher recorded this performance (Figure 12). In it he represents ten individual scenes from the play, many of which illustrate the capture and

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<sup>46</sup> Sandra R. Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia" in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 128: "Livy seems to have replace one dead body with another; Lucretia's corpse hides another, not of the past but of Augustus's emerging imperial order—Gaius Julius Caesar, a man who controlled neither his ambition nor his bodily desires." See also, Donaldson, *Rapes*, 106-07.

<sup>47</sup> In the work, Rome's conversion is related to the rise of the guilds to power in Switzerland. Donaldson, *Rapes*, 108.

punishment of Tarquin, as well as a general view that emphasizes the large crowd of spectators.<sup>48</sup> The analogy to contemporary events would not have escaped many viewers.

Under England's monarchy, the revolutionary theme of Lucretia was potentially both awkward and dangerous. Writers who mention this aspect of the story do so to voice their disapproval. For example, William Fulbecke's 1608 history of Rome firmly denounces the expulsion of the Tarquin line.<sup>49</sup> The political outcome of Lucretia's story would later become a frequent topic of discussion during the rule of Cromwell and the Restoration. In Shakespeare's lifetime, however, such matters were best left unexplored. *Lucrece* actively labors against any possible glorification of republican rule. Donaldson observes, "Metaphors of mutiny, insurrection, and revolt are constantly used throughout the poem to suggest sexual and spiritual disorder. Commonplace as they are, their presence is surprising in a story about a great and justified rebellion...which traditionally asserts the superiority of republican over monarchical rule."<sup>50</sup> Unlike the Netherlands, there was no comparable civil strife afoot in England when *Lucrece* was written, and a young playwright of uncertain fortune would have been an unlikely mouthpiece for revolutionary rhetoric.

If Shakespeare's poem was politically motivated, its politics are those of self-promotion. Shakespeare was not a gentleman by birth, nor a scholar, for he lacked the university education of many of his contemporaries. Therefore, to rewrite the story made

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<sup>48</sup> This performance and Visscher's print are discussed in two exhibition brochures by the National Gallery of Art, Washington: Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Rembrandt's Lucretias, National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 22, 1991-January 5, 1992 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 13 n.21; Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., et al., Jan de Bray and the Classical Tradition (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>49</sup> William Fulbecke's An Abridgement, Or rather, A Bridge of Roman Histories, to passé the nearest way from Titus Livius to Cornelius Tacitus is discussed at greater length in Donaldson, *Rapes*, 111-12.

<sup>50</sup> Donaldson, *Rapes*, 116-17. For a wider discussion of political interpretations in England through the nineteenth century see pages 11-117.

famous by Livy, Ovid, and Chaucer was a campaign of self-aggrandizement, a move made bolder by the youth of his poetic career. At least some readers found Shakespeare's campaign persuasive; in 1598, Francis Meres placed Shakespeare amongst the greatest classical authors in his treatise *Palladis Tamia*:

*As the Greek tongue is made famous and eloquent by Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Æschylus, Sophocles, Pindarus, Phocylides, and Aristophanes; and the Latin tongue by Vergil, Ovid, Horace, Silius Italicus, Lucanus, Lucretius, Ausonius, and Claudianus: so the English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent habiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Chapman.*

*As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared Sonnets among his private friends, &c.<sup>51</sup>*

Meres assures Shakespeare's immortality, but the thirty-year old poet of *Lucrece*, having written only his second published work, could not have smugly anticipated such a warm reception. The subtext of personal politics, whether playfully made or in earnest, is not the chief concern of the poem.

Beyond writing a pendant to *Venus and Adonis* and advertising himself as a poet of timeless merit, Shakespeare had a more compelling purpose for writing *Lucrece*: the poem is a pretense for exploring his views on the visual and verbal arts. Shakespeare seems to draw inspiration from both the theory of *ut pictura poesis*, and more substantially, from the ekphrastic tradition of British poetry.

For poets, the heated Renaissance discussion of *ut pictura poesis* offered an irresistible opportunity to show off one's persuasive capabilities. Like other works that

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<sup>51</sup> Tucker Brooke, *Shakespeare of Stratford, a handbook for students*, The Yale Shakespeare (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 25-26.



participate in the dialogue, *Lucrece* is replete with comparisons of the power of beauty and the power of words. However, the poem exceeds the limitations of the discussion, contradictorily offering both exaltations and criticisms of the two descriptive modes and often rejecting each in its pure form. Rather Shakespeare seems to advocate, as implemented in his poem, an eclectic fusion of the two.

To appreciate the ways in which Shakespeare departs from the conventional *ut pictura poesis* dialogue, some more extensive background is necessary. In his *Ars Poetica* (c.23-20 BC), Horace wrote the now totemic phrase, which means ‘as is painting, so is poetry.’ This one line inspired a lively investigation of painting and poetry’s comparative virtues that reached its zenith during the Renaissance. In antiquity, writers and philosophers seized upon this pairing. Plato, in his *Republic*, castigates both poets and painters, because their occupations work “at the third remove from reality.”<sup>52</sup> In Plato’s assessment, the divine notion of an object is primary, and the created object is secondary. By his reasoning, painters and poets are occupied in imitating these secondary, created objects, and so are at the third remove from the essential form. In these classical texts, poetry and painting were not set in competition, but rather were seen as conceptual bedfellows, whether positively or negatively so.

During the Renaissance, painters became preoccupied with the inequality of their placement in the Mechanical Arts, and their once cozy relationship with poets had disintegrated. Painters along with sculptors and architects were members of a guild

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<sup>52</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 321. Yet, it must be noted that Plato does not place poetry and painting entirely on equal footing. Some forms of poetry are acceptable to Plato, including lyric poetry when it is accompanied by song, and poetry that is made in “the express image of noble character” (87). In contrast, though Plato insinuates that painters will be present in the Republic, he nowhere stipulates which forms of painting will be acceptable in his commonwealth.

system that treated them as craftsmen rather than artists. In the Middle Ages, the painters' role was so misunderstood that Italian painters were placed in the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali*, the guild of doctors and pharmacists. The loose logic employed to justify this arrangement centered on the grindstone used by pharmacists for their medicines and painters for their pigments. Soon after, painters began their long-lived campaign to assume a place amongst the Liberal Arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. From antiquity, only these few arts had been esteemed suitable for gentlemen. From a practical standpoint, their meaner position limited painters by both poorer pay and baser social status. Complaints against their rank sprung up in artistic communities, both in written and painted forms.<sup>53</sup>

Renaissance theorists, following the remarkable example of Leon Battista Alberti, addressed these issues.<sup>54</sup> Alberti's *De Pictura* discusses multiple artistic matters, including optical and perspectival explanations, while focusing intently on the merits of painting: "The virtues of painting, therefore, are that its masters see their works admired and feel themselves to be almost like the Creator....So I would venture to assert that whatever beauty there is in things has been derived from painting."<sup>55</sup> Here Alberti dramatically argues for the supremacy of painting in the depiction of beauty. Still, the very format of the treatise demonstrates Alberti's appreciation of the power of words.

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<sup>53</sup> The description of artists' Renaissance status is indebted to Hartt, *Italian Renaissance Art*, 31-33.

<sup>54</sup> Treatises by other intellectuals discussed these matters; Alison Thorne mentions a few: Gauricus, Pino, Dolce, Armenini, and Lomazzo. Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (New York: St. Martin's Press, LLC; London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 58. Alberti's treatise, written in 1435, was not printed until 1540. Leonardo da Vinci's treatise, which addresses the paragone issues, was also printed posthumously, in 1651.

<sup>55</sup> Alberti as quoted by Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak," 336.

As Alison Thorne writes, “the most significant aspect of *De Pictura* is its bringing together of vision and rhetoric.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, Alberti’s many descriptions of works that he has never seen may be considered his own implementation of the ekphrastic form.<sup>57</sup>

Shakespeare would have been fascinated by the complicated exchange between the visual and the verbal in *De Pictura*. Unfortunately, the world of Italian art theory would have been largely inaccessible to him during the writing of *Lucrece*. Richard Haydocke’s 1598 translation of Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’arte della pittura, scoltura, e architettura* was not only the first English translation of an Italian art treatise, but it was also the first work of its kind printed in England.<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare’s awareness of the theme of *ut pictura poesis* would have been primarily through his knowledge of classical writings as well as through his precious connections to the aristocracy; some members of London’s elite still maintained contact with the continental European art world, despite strained relations with Italy and France.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the notions of art expressed in *Lucrece* are not fully aligned with the arguments that advocate the supremacy of poetry. In *Lucrece*, the visual and the verbal collaborate and contend with one another, display their supremacy and soon later are humbled. While Shakespeare’s poem was inspired by comparisons between painting and poetry, it does not fully participate in this dialogue, nor can it wholly be contained within it.

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<sup>56</sup> Thorne continues, “What seems to me so peculiarly suggestive about Alberti’s approach to painting...is that it juxtaposes a scientific inquiry into the nature of vision with a model of composition capable, by virtue of its linguistic provenance, of mediating between poetry and painting, in ways that invite the reader to make connections between spatial and rhetorical modes of representation.” Ibid., 2.

<sup>57</sup> Barkan describes instances in which Alberti is recounting a work known to him through written accounts, such as his description of the *Calumny of Apelles*. Barkan, “Making Pictures Speak,” 334.

<sup>58</sup> Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> We know that Lord Burghley, Southampton’s benefactor, sent to Paris for prints despite political tensions. Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, 5.

The ekphrastic poetry vogue among Elizabethan poets was likely a greater influence on Shakespeare's *Lucrece*.<sup>60</sup> Of course, this trend was interlinked with the *ut pictura poesis* theme: the interest of poets in their ability to conjure the visual was spurred by comparisons between the arts. Some directly addressed the rank of poetry: Sir Philip Sidney argues for its supremacy in his 1583 essay, *The Defence of Poesie (Apology for Poetry)*.<sup>61</sup> Despite his argument, however, the ekphrastic poems of the period, such as those by Sidney, Marlowe, and Spenser, do not explicitly engage in this debate; instead, the apparent motivation is revelry in their own expressive powers. Leonard Barkan argues that these British poets' "verbal pictures," which "are so patently poetic creations," are concerned with the descriptive force of their own words without reference to any real objects.<sup>62</sup> Edmund Spenser's "verbal picture" in *The Faerie Queen* of an elegant lady traveling with the Knight of the Red Cross well illustrates Barkan's point:

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,  
 Upon a lowly Asse more white than snow,  
 Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide  
 Under a vele, that wimpled was full low,  
 And over all a blacke stole she did throw,  
 As one that inly mourned: so was she sad,  
 And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow:  
 Seemèd in heart some hidden care she had,  
 And by her in a line a milke white lambe she lad (Book 1, Canto 1, 4)<sup>63</sup>

While the passage means to evoke a visual image, it is not concerned with a thorough record of an actual scene and lacks the solidity of a Renaissance painter's portrayal. A

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<sup>60</sup> "The canonical literary masterpieces of this period are among the most "pictorial" poetic works of all time." Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak," 331.

<sup>61</sup> "There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object...[But] only the poet...lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature." Sir Phillip Sidney as quoted by Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak," 335-36.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>63</sup> The first three books of this poem were published in 1590. Margaret Ferguson, et al., ed. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, shorter 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 117.

similar phenomenon is found in Sidney's description of an artwork from his *New Arcadia*: "There was Diana when Acteon saw her bathing, in whose cheeks the painter had set such a colour as was mixed between shame and distain."<sup>64</sup> While Sidney recognizes the artistry of the painter, he is unable to evoke the properties of his skill. The result is not a tangible vision but rather an elegant poetic fantasy.

Shakespeare breaks from this tradition in that his ekphrastic passages do not merely employ pictorial language, but also celebrate particularities of the visual artist's skill. His passage on the Fall of Troy painting admires the compositional complexity of the (likely imagined) work in his description of crowd:

*Some high, some low, the painter was so nice:  
The scalps of many almost hid behind,  
To jump up higher seem'd, to mock the mind.*

*Here one man's hand lean'd on another's head,  
His nose being shadowed by his neighbour's ear (1412-1416)*

While this passage certainly flatters the poet's own verbal skill, it does not begrudge the artist his due praise.<sup>65</sup> The passage, then, reflects Shakespeare's larger argument for the complimentary powers of the visual and the verbal. Additionally, the realism expressed in these lines supports Shakespeare's argument for painting's ability to enlighten.

Breaking from the British ekphrastic tradition, which celebrates the verbal with little appreciation for the power of the visual, Shakespeare advocates a mutual reliance of the two artistic methods. In *Lucrece* he ultimately rejects both bipartisan arguments of artistic superiority and British poets' narcissistic use of the ekphrastic form.

Shakespeare's aesthetic appreciation was acute; as a man of the theater, he was

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted by Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak," 333.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Barkan discusses a lengthier passage from Shakespeare's treatment of the Troy painting and also notes the poet's unusual attention to the artwork as a created physical object (333-34).

conditioned to think in a visual mode. Perhaps it was through his visual literacy that he arrived as such a collegial prescription. Leading by example, *Lucrece* recommends that poets recognize the powerful capabilities of the visual through a collaborative employment of the two descriptive modes.

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What was the artistic impact of Shakespeare's *Lucrece*? It is difficult to say with any precision. Elizabethan authors and critics made occasional reference to this work. Its rousing success of four editions in two years testifies to its popularity with a wide audience.<sup>66</sup> One contemporary commentator compared its quality to that of *Hamlet*, a coupling that would never be made by today's critical community.<sup>67</sup> Though Shakespeare's poem in part addresses issues of *ut pictura poesis*, regrettably no direct response to his argument has been found. Lucretia continued to be a source of endless fascination for writers and painters alike. In the next century, Rembrandt van Rijn and Artemisia Gentileschi made notable contributions (Figures 13-16). Gentileschi in particular may have had access to Shakespeare's poem through her connections to London. Her father Orazio was a painter at the court of Charles I for many years where she joined him for a length of time.<sup>68</sup> Still, no notable reaction to Shakespeare's poem can be recovered in her images. Even in the twentieth century, authors continued to react

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<sup>66</sup> The fourth quarto of *Lucrece* was printed from the third by Richard Field in 1596. A fifth was printed in 1607 and a sixth in 1616. For more information about editions of the poem, see Prince, *Poems*, xiii-xx.

<sup>67</sup> In a discussion of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Gabriel Harvey wrote, "But his *Lucrece*, & his tragedie of *Hamlet*, Prince of Denmarke, have it in them, to please the wiser sort." Akrigg, *Southampton*, 199.

<sup>68</sup> The first documented evidence of A. Gentileschi in London dates to 1639. Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 223. Though this is after the artist's first experimentation with the subject of Lucretia (Figure 13), it does precede both her *Lucretia* (c.1642-43, Capodimonte, Naples) and her *Tarquin and Lucretia* (Figure 14). For a reproduction of the Naples *Lucretia*, refer to Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), color plate 22.

strongly to the figure of Lucretia. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir dismisses her importance, but deems her historically significant enough to do so!<sup>69</sup>

In some ways, the limited impact of Shakespeare's artistic philosophy is entirely sensical. *Lucrece* contains no overt pronouncements on the nature of the visual and the verbal, nor does it recommend a ranking of the two. Shakespeare's philosophy remains a subtext of the poem, present in his liberal intermixing of visual and verbal descriptions. Echoes of this ideology can occasionally be glimpsed in subsequent works. The pervasive silence of Rembrandt's Lucretias and their wordless pantomime, in addition to their denial of narrative context, at first seem to reject Shakespeare's doctrine (Figures 15-16). Yet, these elements are mediated by the very necessity of a textual background: Rembrandt's paintings are incomprehensible without a prior literary knowledge. Such readings as these, which write Shakespeare into the paintings of later masters, may be initially compelling but are ultimately fruitless.

The greatest impact of *Lucrece* is found on the author himself. Though he never again broaches the topic of art and poetry so directly and expansively, traces of this debate can be found in many of Shakespeare's plays. He toys with the veracity of the visual in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, placing the head of an ass on the buffoon Bottom. *King Lear* is a meditation on the consequences of blindness: physical, emotional, and moral. Perhaps this fascination is most evident in *Hamlet*, wherein soothsaying visions torment the melancholy prince. Hamlet is wracked by many conflicts of thought, one of which is the truth of the visual. He declares to Ophelia, "Your honesty should admit no

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<sup>69</sup> Speaking of the role of women in history, De Beauvoir writes: "Through them certain events have been set off, but the women have been pretexts rather than agents. The suicide of Lucretia has had value only as a symbol." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. By H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 131.

discourse to your beauty” (III.i.108-08), and a few lines later chastises her for a made-up face: “I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourself another” (III.i.144-46). Yet, still Hamlet maintains hope in the truth-telling power of the visual, as he studies the king’s countenance for signs of guilt during the internal play of the third act. A lengthier examination of the plays would produce a copious quantity of lines that pursue the issues outlined in *Lucrece*.<sup>70</sup> In truth, Shakespeare’s dual implementation of the visual and the verbal is less suited to poetry than to his primary art form, the theater, which fully exploits the capabilities of the written and visual arts.

Borne out of the subject of *ut picture poesis*, Renaissance debates, the ekphrastic poetry tradition, and the myriad of Lucretia portrayals, Shakespeare’s fascination with the visual and the verbal, sometime scrutinizing, sometimes playful, was a lifelong engagement. I have argued that *Lucrece* expresses these interests in an informal, but cogent subtext, which presents Shakespeare’s philosophy of art. That philosophy urges the unification between visual and verbal arts heretofore lacking in the British poetic tradition. It does so through the poet’s ekphrastic celebration of the ability of the visual artist and the illuminating potential of painting, as well as through the poet’s own complimentary implementation of visual and verbal components. As the excavation of a philosophy of art is inherently of interest to all who study historical attitudes towards the nature of the visual and the verbal, my findings serve to advance the ongoing interdisciplinary discourse on this subject.

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<sup>70</sup> A discussion of the significance of visual imagery in Shakespeare’s other works can be found in Rosand, “Troyes Painted Woes.”





Figure 1: Anonymous, *Lucretia*, from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, 1404 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 598, fol. 72v.)



Figure 2: Sandro Botticelli, *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, c.1499, tempera on panel (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)



Figure 3: Paolo Veronese, *Lucretia*, 1580-85, oil on canvas  
(Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie)



Figure 4: Israhel van Mechenem, *The Suicide of Lucretia*, c. 1500-03, engraving  
(Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art)





Figure 5: Tiziano Vecellio (called Titian), *Tarquin and Lucretia*, c.1570, oil on canvas (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum)



Figure 6: Heinrich Aldegrever after George Pencz, *Tarquinius and Lucretia*, 1539, engraving (London, The British Museum)

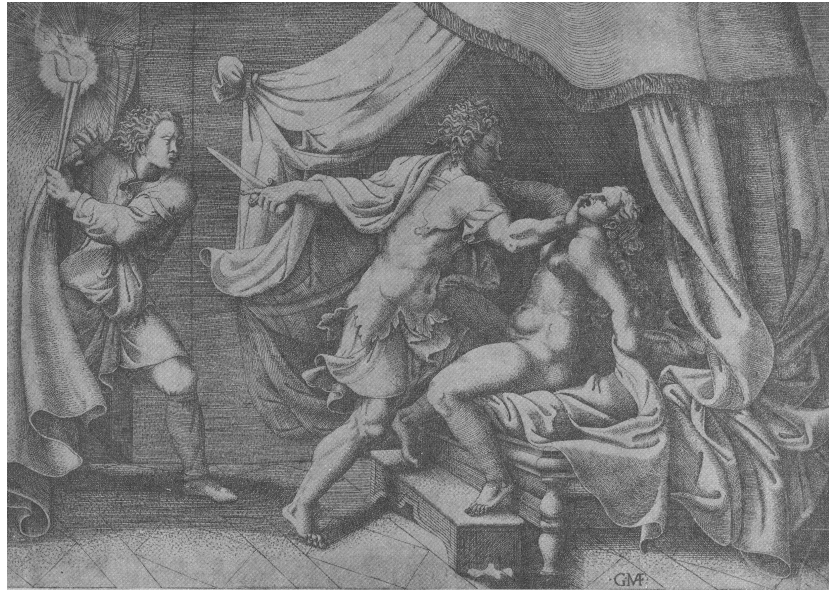


Figure 7: Giorgio Ghisi after Giulio Romano, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, c.1540, engraving (California, Collection of R.E. Lewis, Inc.)

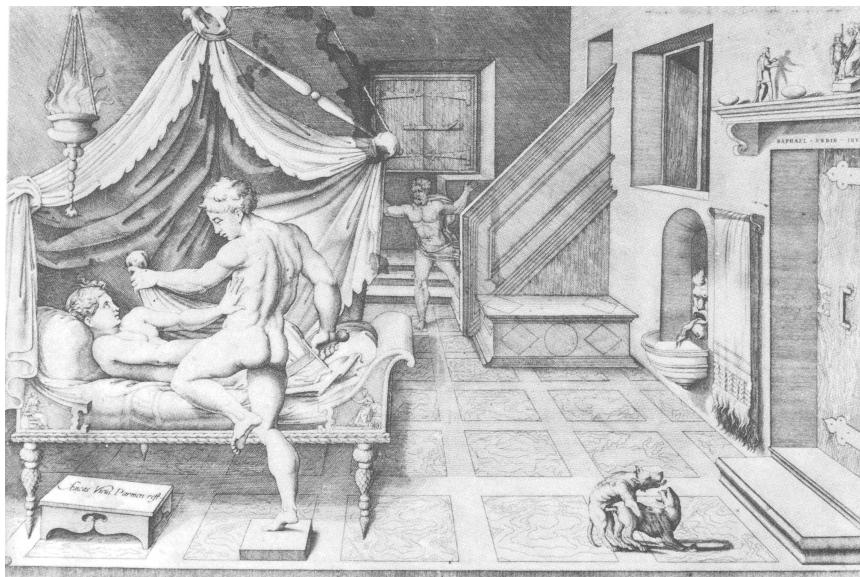


Figure 8: Agostino Veneziano after Raphael, reworked by Enea Vico, *Tarquinius and Lucretia*, 1524, engraving (London, The British Museum)



Figure 9: Hans Baldung Grien, *The Death of Lucretia*, c.1511, woodcut (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts)



Figure 10: Enea Vico after Parmigianino, *Lucretia Preparing to Kill Herself*, engraving (London, The British Museum)

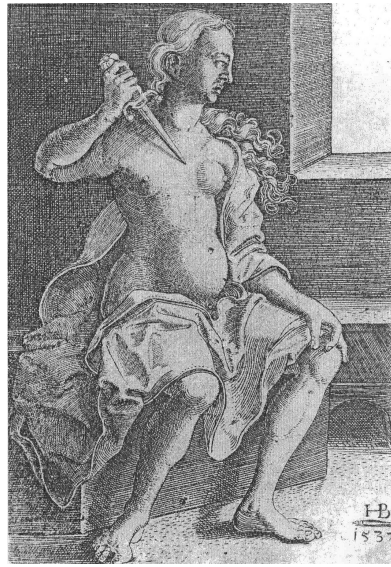


Figure 11: Hans Brosamer, *Death of Lucretia*, 1537, engraving  
(London, The Warburg Institute)

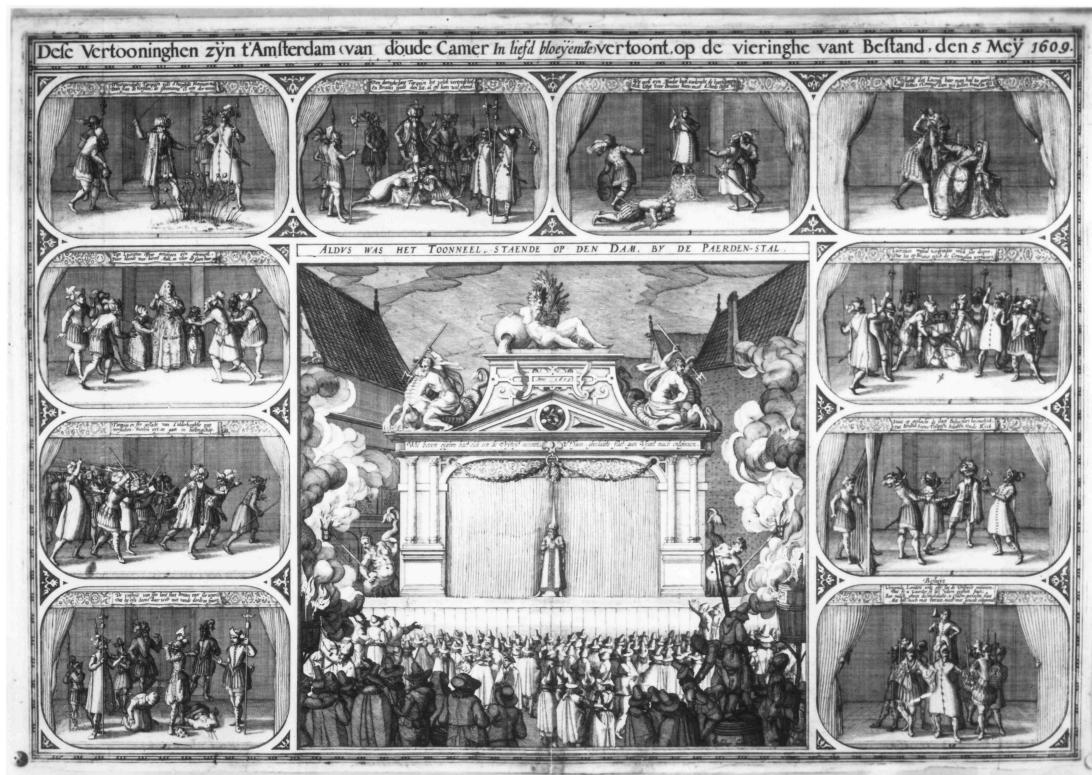


Figure 12: Claes Jansz. Visscher, *The Play of Lucretia's Sacrifice*, 1609, engraving  
(Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet)





Figure 13: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Lucretia*, c.1623-25, oil on canvas (Milan, Gerolamo Etro)



Figure 14: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Rape of Lucretia*, c.1645, oil on canvas (Potsdam, Neues Palais)

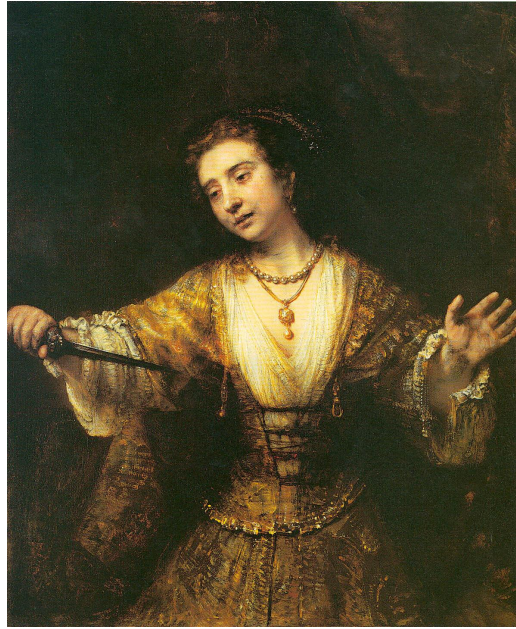


Figure 15: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Lucretia*, 1664, oil on canvas (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art)



Figure 16: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Lucretia*, 1666, oil on canvas (Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts)



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